

Top Ten Strategies for Organizing a Successful Citywide Pro Bono Celebration
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In October, 2009, Philadelphia kicked off National Pro Bono Week with a mix of training events, educational forums and direct service opportunities for lawyers interested in helping those most in need in our community. Reflecting on our work and what we learned, we offer the following tips for organizing a successful citywide pro bono celebration:

1. Task a committee of dedicated folks to plan the week.

The Pro Bono Subcommittee of the Philadelphia Bar Association was the natural choice to plan the week. The group included members from the area law schools, legal services agencies, and law firms.

2. Involve and seek input from key stakeholders.

Once the committee agreed to plan the week, we asked for input from key stakeholders. Those stakeholders included law firm pro bono coordinators, law school public interest directors, legal services agency staff, Bar Association staff and leadership, and the judiciary. The input provided helped us plan a week that had “buy in” and attracted a variety of constituencies.

3. Decide on goals for the week and plan events that accomplish those goals.

Based on the input from key stakeholders, we planned a series of events to highlight the terrific pro bono work already happening in Philadelphia, and a series of trainings and service events to involve new volunteers.

4. Set calendar of events early on.

We set our schedule of events by March, 2009, and got the word out to our key stakeholders shortly thereafter. As a result, there were few conflicting events during that week, and our events received great publicity.

5. Highlight the judiciary.

Since we knew from the stakeholders that having judicial involvement would help with turnout, we invited judges to every event. Once we confirmed their attendance, we highlighted their involvement in our advertising and gave them a prominent role at the event.

6. Have a beginning and an end to the week.

Our committee planned the week with a kickoff event, followed by a recruitment event, a series of trainings and direct service clinics, and ending with a capstone CLE. This structure provided a natural beginning, middle and an end to the week. Having

this structure ensured that our first events could feed attendees into the later events, and the last event helped us plan for the future.

7. Provide varied options for pro bono service.

We opted to include both hands on service events (legal clinics) with training programs for future service. This ensured that volunteers who wanted to provide service that week could do so, but also recruited volunteers for the long-term.

8. Tell people about it.

Early on we involved the communications department of the Philadelphia Bar Association to help get the word out about the week. The expert advice from the bar association staff clarified our goals and streamlined our messages. With their help, we came up with a strategic communications plan to generate excitement prior to the week, to publicize events during the week, and to highlight the successes after the week.

9. Gather feedback from attendees.

While we weren't as consistent about this as we should have been, we did solicit feedback about our events from attendees. Based on that feedback, we are already making changes to plan for the 2010 celebration.

10. Start planning today.

And last but not least, start planning now for a successful citywide pro bono event!